

Bayou Corne

The Napoleon Salt Dome runs for miles below the marsh lands of lower Louisiana. Caverns are carved into the dome as salt is mined for multiple uses. The caverns can serve as storage of natural gas and other products. A cavern operated by Texas Brine, Inc. was built a little too close to the edge of the Dome. At a depth of about 1300 feet, the side wall collapsed into the cavern. As a result, a sinkhole appeared between the Texas Brine facility and the town of Bayou Corne. Natural gas seeps that have always been present in the area increased in number and bubbling volume. EPA responded to a request from Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ). LDEQ had been tasked by the Emergency Manager to conduct air monitoring near the sinkhole and at several locations in the town.

EPA took the night and weekend shifts and monitored for explosivity and the presence of components of natural gas. This provided the Incident Management Team the information that could be presented to concerned citizens.

The reports of radioactive material being disposed of in the cavern concerned the interested parties. EPA provided the ASPECT plane to fly over the sinkhole and surrounding area. It turned out that the highest concentration of radioactive material was found on the farmers' fields where fertilizer containing naturally occurring radioisotopes had been applied.